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ENEMY HITS HARD AT LAOS POSITIONS

Start of Drive on Key Base
Near Plain Is Indicated
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VIENTIANE, Laos, Dec. 11—Communist forces mounted heavy attacks on Laotian Government positions near the forward base supporting operations on the Plaine des Jarres over the weekend in what may be the start of a new drive to overrun the base.

The attacks, which were believed to have overrun two Government positions, increased pressure on Long

The plain itself is occupied by strong North Vietnamese forces, and Long Tieng serves as a base for air operations and Government guerrilla attacks against the plain. The base, which lies in a rugged valley, is the headquarters of Gen. Vang Pao and the irregular Meo troops he commands.

Laotian forces in the area are supplied, advised and in some cases commanded by officials of the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

Two of the positions believed to have been overrun in heavy shelling and ground attacks Friday and Saturday were close to the southern tip of the plain. A third position attacked and believed overrun was only five miles east southeast of Long Tieng, military informants here said. Contact with the Government unit there was lost and many of the defenders are believed to be missing.

Long a Focus of Fighting

In another action near the plain, Communist commandos reportedly attempted to set off explosive charges against defenses at the eastern end of the Long Tieng valley, but were repulsed.

The Long Tieng base, which is supplied by air, is surrounded by mountains in which strong Communist forces frequently operate. Military officials here say the Communists could probably take the base any time they choose, provided they were willing to pay a high cost in casualties.

But a military source said today that the situation there was not regarded as "any worse than usual" and that the several thousand military dependents living at Long Tieng were apparently not seeking to leave.

The Plaine des Jarres, a plateau surrounded by mountains, has been fought over for more than a decade by Communist, neutralist and rightist forces, changing hand frequently.

In official dispatches it is frequently referred to as "strategic," but there are increasing doubts among military observers here as to its real strategic value.

"Obviously we would like to get it back if only because the refugees who left there when the Communists took over would like to go home," an American officer said. "It is important to the Meo tribesmen whose home is there. But in terms of deciding the war in Laos the plain has long been overrated."

In recent months General Vang Pao and his Meo troops have made several attempts to regain a toehold on the plain, but have been driven off each time.

Drive in South Continues

In southern Laos, Government forces were reported today to be continuing their thrust eastward from the recently recaptured market town of Dong Hene past Muong Phalane and toward the Ho Chi Minh Trail network bordering South Vietnam.

The Vientiane troops were said to have recaptured a large cache of Communist mortar and rocket shells in a clash seven miles southeast of Muong Phalane. Street fighting was reported continuing in Muong Phalane against North Vietnamese bunkers.

Elsewhere in southern Laos, 10 clashes or shelling attacks were reported around Saravane, which has changed hands a number of times during the last month. Government troops have a precarious hold on the abandoned and shattered town, but Communist pressure remains intense, and a North Vietnamese counter-~~attack~~ is expected.



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Heavy Communist attacks were reported near Long Tieng (1). Laotians were driving eastward in the Dong Hene area (2).

Tieng, the Government's forward base in the mountains southwest of the Plaine des Jarres.